

THORNEY RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL.

Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health **FOR 1913.**

MR. CHAIRMAN AND GENTLEMEN,

The following Report is drawn up in accordance with the Regulations of the Local Government Board, and the various remarks are grouped under headings as suggested in the Official Memorandum.

A (i.) Natural and Social Conditions of the District.

Thorney is situated in Cambridgeshire, and is in the Administrative County of the Isle of Ely, and is included in the Peterborough Union.

The Village of Thorney stands on slightly higher ground than the surrounding Fen, and was formerly an island, before the great work of drainage was carried out by the Dukes of Bedford and by the "Adventurers" in the 17th Century.

The surrounding country is entirely Fenland, and the soil consists of a black vegetable loam, and in places of a silty clay, with a clay subsoil. Parts of the Parish are still liable to be flooded, as was the case in August, 1911.

The Parish extends roughly from three to five miles in every direction from the Village, and comprises 18,957 acres (Thorney 17,842, Stanground North 1,117), of which about 40 acres consists of drains and dykes.

The District is both watered and drained artificially, and forms part of the North Level Division of the Bedford Level.

(ii.) Agricultural labourers, with their wives and children, form the bulk of the population, the remainder consisting of farmers, small holders, and the usual village tradesmen.

Unemployment is unknown among the Inhabitants, and Poor Law relief is rarely needed except by the aged. The average wage of a working-man, including perquisites, is 17 to 18 shillings per week.

At times more labour is required, and this demand is met by hiring gangs of men or women from neighbouring villages, who drive in trolleys to their work and return home at night.

The ill-effects of this system are more obvious in the adjoining Parishes, where it is seen that the homes of the labourers are apt to be neglected, owing to their women-folk going out to work in the fields. Where ordinary hospital treatment is necessary the Infirmary at Peterborough is generally utilised. The population at the time of the Census, 1911, was 1,872, and is estimated at 1,927 for the year 1913.

B. Sanitary circumstances of the District.

Water Supply.—The District is supplied with water which is obtained from the River Nene.

At a place, called the "Dog-in-a-Doublet" Sluice, an artificial cut leads from the Nene to the Village of Thorney. This cut, called the Thorney River, is about $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles long, and after reaching the Village divides into smaller drains which distribute water to different parts of the Parish.

Confusion sometimes exists owing to the use of the word "drain." In this locality it usually refers to a water-channel, about 10ft. wide, which is used for running fresh water to the parts where it is needed, and is also used for draining away surplus water after a heavy rainfall; these drains gradually unite into larger ones, which eventually discharge into the main drain of the North Level, whence the water flows out into the Wash.

The water required by the Village is filtered through gravel and sand, pumped into tanks in a high tower, and distributed from thence to the various houses and premises.

During the year the filter beds have been uncovered. Previously they were enclosed by an arched brick roof, with large inspection doors let into the roof.

Recent analyses show a marked improvement in the purity of the water. The figures showing the amount of albumenoid nitrogen present and the amount of oxygen absorbed still indicate that the water is not so pure as it should be, but in a fen district it is impossible to obtain good water, except in a few places where there is an outcrop of gravel with springs in it.

A probable cause of the impurity of the water is the impure effluent pumped into the Nene from the Sewage Farm of the Peterborough Corporation.

This matter is at present undecided, but in the immediate future steps are to be taken to try and remedy the fault.

Outside the Village the Inhabitants rely for their supply of water upon what they can catch from roofs and store in tanks, and they supplement this supply by taking water from the nearest drain.

Failing both these sources water is fetched from the villages by the Landlord concerned in a water-cart.

Boring for water has been tried on various occasions in likely spots in the Parish, but no suitable or adequate supply has been found.

The water tower and plant, together with the adjacent buildings, the Thorney river and the main drains (other than those under the jurisdiction of the North Level Commissioners) were transferred by the Duke of Bedford to a body of Commissioners at the time he sold this Estate. The Thorney Drainage Act, 1911, confers on these Commissioners the powers of a Local Authority in matters appertaining to the Water Supply and Sewerage of the District.

Sewerage.—Some of the houses in the Village are supplied with water closets: the sewage from these runs into sewers which empty into tanks built in the waterworks yard, and is pumped from them on to a small farm belonging to the Thorney Drainage Board.

Many of the farm houses are fitted with water closets, and the contents are pumped on to fields at a distance from the house; suitable inspection chambers and traps are provided along the course of the drain pipes.

The remainder of the houses in the Village and all the cottages in the Fen employ the pail system. In the Village a cart is sent round into which the pails are emptied, and a fresh supply of dry earth is available for all who need it. In the Fen the cottagers are responsible for emptying their pails on adjoining fields.

Scavenging.—Refuse bins (moveable) are emptied regularly by a cart sent round for the purpose; all paper and vegetable refuse is burnt and the rubbish is shot into old pits away from the Village.

During the year 22 houses have discontinued the use of fixed ashbins in favour of moveable receptacles.

Sanitary Inspection of District.

During the year 77 houses have been inspected by the Inspector of Nuisances and 150 by the Medical Officer of Health. In a few instances general lack of cleanliness was complained of, and on further inspection this fault was found to be rectified.

Two informal notices were served to owners of cottages respecting overcrowding, and in each case the nuisance was stopped.

Two statutory notices were served to owners, respecting necessary repairs in one case and the provision of further accommodation in the other, and in each case the order was promptly complied with.

No Closing Orders were made.

The Inspector reports:—The majority of the cottages in the District are substantially built, and are in a good state of repair, and where a few minor faults have been found in some of the older cottages these have been remedied when pointed out to the respective owners. Probably in no other District of England can be seen

such good houses as are seen in Thorney, both farmhouses and workmen's dwellings. It is very exceptional to find any structural defects, and it is rare to discover on inspection dirty and untidy cottages. Since the sale of the Estate several of the farmhouses have been occupied by foremen on the farms who take in lodgers, so that by this means more labourers can be accommodated on some of the occupations.

Premises and Occupations which can be controlled by Bye-Laws.

There are no Bye-Laws in force.

There are no common lodging-houses, canal boats, or knackers' yards in the District, and no offensive trades *e.g.* maggot breeding, are carried on.

No underground sleeping rooms.

Schools.—There are two sets of Schools in the Village, one for boys and the other for girls and infants. These Schools derive their water supply from the public source, and their drains and waterclosets are connected up to the Village sewers. There are also two Schools in outlying Districts of the Fen, one at Knarr Fen and the other at Wrydecroft, with separate class-rooms for girls and boys. They are spacious and well lighted, and suitably warmed in winter. Tanks for water supply and earth closets are in use. A caretaker and his wife live in an adjoining house at each School, and they are responsible for cleaning the class-rooms, windows, &c., light fires, and attend to lavatories.

The Isle of Ely County Council appoint a whole time Medical Officer, who combines the duties of School Medical Officer and County Medical Officer of Health.

During the autumn an epidemic of Scarlet Fever occurred in the Village Schools, which necessitated closing them at times. This matter is alluded to later.

FOOD SUPPLY.—Milk.—Two carts are sent round the Village daily from which milk is sold, and several people sell milk in small quantities for the convenience of neighbours. In the Fen the cottagers are dependent on the nearest farmers for any milk they may require. As this is not a District suitable for dairy work few of the farmers keep cows, except for supplying their own household's needs: this means great difficulty for the cottagers in obtaining milk even when there is illness in their houses. Most of them manage without milk or else use condensed milk. The Dairies, Cow-sheds, and Milkshops Orders are not in force.

Other Foods.—No unsound food has been detected exposed for sale during the year, and the premises where food is prepared or exposed for sale are in good sanitary condition. The bake-houses and slaughtershop are well looked after, and no Tuberculous carcasses have been condemned.

Housing.—The houses, both farmhouses and cottages, are exceptionally good. They are well built of brick and slate, and are spacious, well ventilated, well lighted, and suitably provided with offices. They are usually built in blocks of 6 or 8, occasionally in pairs, and most of them contain two good living rooms, with two and frequently three bedrooms. All have a fireplace in one bedroom, and many have two bedrooms with fireplaces.

Outhouses, such as wash-house, coal-house, privy, &c., are well built and generally separated from the dwelling-house by a paved, gravel, or asphalt yard.

Twelve new cottages were built last year by the Rural District Council, and are large, roomy cottages.

They each contain two living rooms, three bedrooms, and are provided with a bath, a rood of land, and a pigsty. The County Council are building two better class cottages for the occupation of small-holders farming under them.

There is still need for more houses in the District, but the need is chiefly felt by farmers in outlying Districts, and probably some of these farmers will build in the near future.

Modern conditions of agriculture in the District demand the employment of extra hands for short periods, *e.g.* harvest; setting, lifting and riddling potatoes; cutting mustard and turnip seed; and these hands are usually forthcoming from neighbouring villages. If there were enough houses built to accommodate them all there would be periods of unemployment.

As mentioned under the heading of Sanitary Inspection of the District, the houses in this area are very good, well built, and in good repair. The number of houses inspected was 220; none were found to be in a state injurious to health, and consequently unfit for human habitation.

No representations were made to the Local Authority with a view to making Closing Orders ; no Closing Orders were made. In two cases defects were remedied without making Closing Orders.

The defects found were lack of cleanliness (5) ; sunken wall, ill-fitting windows (1) ; overcrowding (2) ; open gulleys in buildings adjoining living-rooms (2) ; insufficient accommodation and no pantry (1).

Sanitary Administration of the District.

1.—The staff consists of the Medical Officer of Health and the Inspector of Nuisances.

2.—HOSPITAL ACCOMMODATION.—The Peterborough Infirmary is the nearest general Hospital, containing 60 beds, and supported by voluntary contributions. The Workhouse Infirmary of the Peterborough Union is also available for suitable cases.

There is an arrangement whereby Thorney, together with other Districts, subscribe an annual sum to the Peterborough Corporation, in return for which these Districts have a right to a limited number of beds in a small Isolation Hospital reserved for the treatment of Small Pox.

There was a Conference in February, 1912, between representatives of Rural Districts in the neighbourhood of Peterborough to discuss the advisability of providing an Isolation Hospital for Infectious Diseases, but the matter is still not decided.

3.—The Tuberculosis Order, 1912, the Orders concerning Acute Poleomyelitis and Epidemic Cerebro-Spinal Meningitis are in force.

Your Council have recently taken steps to adopt Section 7 of the Infectious Diseases Prevention Act and Sections 52, 62, and 66 of the Public Health Acts Amendment Act.

4.—During the year samples of water were sent to be analysed on two occasions, and specimens for the detection of Diphtheria Bacilli twice and for Tubercle Bacilli on eleven occasions. Of these specimens one proved to be Diphtheria, and six of the specimens of sputum contained Tubercle Bacilli ; five were free.

The following report was received concerning a sample of drinking water :—
“ The results afford no definite evidence of pollution of the sample with sewage or animal excreta, and indicate an improvement in bacterial purity over the last sample examined.”

D. Prevalence of and control over Acute Infectious Diseases.

During the year two cases of Diphtheria occurred in the District, 35 cases of Scarlet Fever, and one of Puerperal Fever.

A report was furnished on December 22nd, 1913, dealing with the epidemic of Scarlet Fever. Briefly the report showed that the disease originated among and was spread by the children attending the Village Schools, and except for five cases all the patients were school children, the five referred to being in two cases the parents, and the fifth the uncle of infected children.

The schools involved were closed from October 15th to October 24th, and again from December 2nd, 1913, to February 5th, 1914. The source of infection could not be traced in the earlier cases, and the later ones undoubtedly contracted it either in school or through contact with patients, who had the disease so mildly that it was not recognised in the early stages by the parents. Those affected acquired the disease in a very mild form and few were seriously ill ; several were only discovered to have had it when found peeling. At the time of writing (Jan. 27th, 1914), there have been no fresh cases during the last fortnight.

The parents or guardians of infected persons are given instructions as to the necessity for isolating the sick, disinfecting clothing, &c., and when certified to be free from infection the premises are disinfected by the Inspector of Nuisances. A few cases of measles occurred in April.

Tuberculosis.

During the year eight cases of Tuberculosis were notified ; in two cases bones were affected, the remaining six were pulmonary cases.

Leaflets and general instructions were given to all, and an attempt was made to discover other cases among contacts. When a tubercular patient leaves his house or dies the rooms are disinfected by the Inspector.

No Sanatorium or Dispensary is as yet in existence for the District, but the Isle of Ely Insurance Committee make arrangements for the admission of suitable cases to Sanatoria outside their area.

F. Other Diseases.

Irregular forms of rheumatism are very prevalent in the District, and when the rainfall is abnormally low various forms of Enteritis are common, but no deaths from this cause occurred during the year.

Furunculosis is especially prevalent at times.

Phthisis and malignant disease have been of frequent occurrence for years in this neighbourhood, but not noticeably so during 1913.

G. Means of Preventing Infantile Mortality in Childbirth and in Infancy.

There is no registered midwife in practice in the District, but it is rare for pregnant women not to engage a doctor to attend them in their confinement.

Most of the mothers suckle their children, and the difficulty of obtaining cow's milk encourages this desirable habit.

During the year four children died under one year of age (a rate of 62·5 per 1,000 births). One of these deaths was due to Bronchitis, one to Congenital Debility, one to Premature Birth, and the fourth to a Congenital Defect of the Spine.

H. Vital Statistics.

The usual Tables are appended to this Report, but a short abstract is given here. For convenience in comparing figures the averages for the previous five years are also shown.

	1913.					Average 1908—1912.		
	1927	...	...	...	1813	
					Rate per 1000.			Rate per 1000.
Births registered	...	64	...	33·21	...	...	48	...
Deaths registered	...	15	...	7·78	...	...	19	...

There were two illegitimate births registered.

Of the fifteen deaths one was that of an old resident who died in the Workhouse at Peterborough.

The average age of seven of those who died was 82 years.

Four children under one year of age died ; of the remaining four deaths one was a consumptive lad, aged 24 years ; another a young woman of 23, who died of Puerperal Fever ; another a man of 56 (Pneumonia) ; and the fourth a man of 53 (Cancer of Lung).

There are 422 inhabited houses in the District, with an average of 4·5 persons to each house.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient Servant,

HAROLD CLAPHAM, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P.,

*Medical Officer of Health to the
Thorney Rural District Council.*

Thorney,
January, 1914.

1913.

*The Rural District Council
of Thorney.*

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

MEDICAL OFFICER

OF HEALTH.